A NATIONAL PROGRAM

Elise H. Martens

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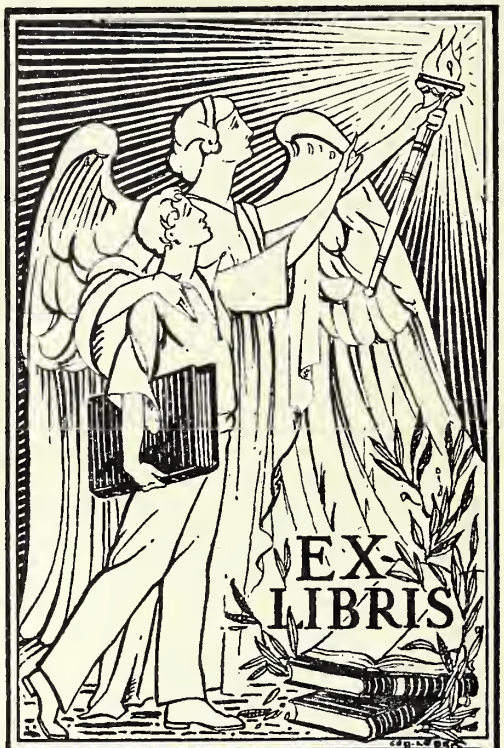

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A National Program

By ELISE H. MARTENS

THE TITLE of this article will immediately raise in the minds of many the questions: Is there "a national program" for the education of exceptional children? Should there be such a program? To both of these questions the answer offered by the writer is unequivocally negative if by "a national program" is meant a closely knit organization directed by a central agency and reaching into every state of the Union. On the other hand, if "a national program" is one that is characterized by a nationwide solidarity and coordination of purposes and activities, sponsored by national agencies, and applied by every state of the Union in terms of its own needs and through its own administrative arrangements, the answers to the two questions raised will be quite different. To the first one, the response will still need to be "No," for while there are numerous national agencies at work, each seeking to develop a nationwide program in a particular field, yet it must be admitted that in too many states a carefully planned program for the education of any or all types of exceptional children is still nonexistent. To the second question, however, the answer is an unreserved "Yes," for no one doubts that the public school program in every state should include suitable provisions for exceptional children and that there should be available to every state certain advisory and other types of services for the promotion and extension of the program on a statewide and a nationwide scale. This article proposes to consider to what extent and in what ways state and national facilities are at present operating for this purpose, what some of the most significant developments have been, and what some of the general principles and problems are that are common to every state program.

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National Agencies at Work

Among the effective forces for promoting an adjusted educational program for exceptional children are the voluntary associations and foundations espousing, respectively, the interests of the blind, the partially seeing, the deaf, the hard of hearing, the crippled, the speech defective, the mentally deficient, and the socially maladjusted or delinquent. Each of these organizations is really carrying on a national program of its own. Each has rendered service in emphasizing educational objectives for handicapped children, urging needed improvements in educational practices, and developing standards of preparation for educational workers. Through their promotional activities, their publications, their annual or biennial conferences, and their leadership and participation in legislative and other service projects, they have made outstanding contributions to the progress of special education for handicapped children in the states.

For example, the Volta Bureau[1] is a national source of much practical help in the interests of the deaf and the hard of hearing. It distributes widely literature written for parents, teachers, and others handling problems of adjustment caused by defective hearing. Similarly, the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness[2] publishes extensive material and through its staff members offers courses in methods of sight conservation in the summer schools of recognized universities. The National Society for Crippled Children[3] furnishes library service, conducts annually a study group for crippled children's workers, and otherwise seeks to advance the cause of the handicapped group which it represents. These are but a few of the score or more national voluntary agencies[4] contributing to the available resources in this field.

The national picture includes also certain governmental bureaus charged with educational re-

[1] With headquarters at 1537 Thirty-seventh Street N.W., Washington, D. C.

[2] With headquarters at 50 West Fiftieth Street, New York City.

[3] With headquarters in Elyria, Ohio.

[4] A complete list of such agencies is available from the Office of Education upon request.

The two ways most frequently mentioned of promoting special education in the smaller communities and in rural districts are centralization of schools and state aid. The centralized school provides enough handicapped children for a special class, and state aid provides the funds to secure a well-trained teacher.

While the large centralized school has made possible the formation of special classes which otherwise could not have been organized, it has by no means solved the problem, since few centralized schools are large enough to justify a special class for each type of handicapped child which requires special aid. How are we going to provide special education in those schools which do not have enough handicapped children of a given type to justify the formation of a special class? They must not be neglected.

This problem has not been satisfactorily solved even in those states which provide state aid, for rarely is state aid extended to all types of handicapped children who need special education. Frequently it covers only the most seriously handicapped children of a given type. Again, it is contingent on the presence of enough handicapped children to form a special class.

The fundamental mistake which has been made in trying to provide special education for exceptional children in smaller communities and rural districts has been in assuming that the big-city mode of special education can be carried over without change to these smaller communities and rural areas.

The big-city mode of special education involves segregation of each type of exceptional child into a special class with special equipment. Each special class is taught by a teacher who has been specially trained to teach only that particular type of handicapped child. Special classes or special schools for the blind, the partially seeing, the deaf, the hard of hearing, the defective in speech, the mentally retarded, the truant and delinquent, the crippled, the anemic and tuberculous, and the gifted indicate the differentiation of special education in some large city school systems.

It is obvious that the large city setup of special education is impossible in rural counties. Recognizing this fact, many superintendents, principals, and teachers in the smaller school districts have dismissed special education with the remark, "We do not have enough exceptional children of any one type to form a special class."

In making this statement they fail to realize that the special class is not the only way, and in many cases not the best way, of providing special education, i.e., equality of educational opportunity for the exceptional child.

It is essential to the fullest success of special education in any school that the regular grade teacher feel just as responsible for the education of the handicapped child as she now feels for the education of the child who is not handicapped, that she specialize on the strength instead of on the weakness of the handicapped child, and that she recognize that courses of study and methods of instruction are but means to an end—the development of the child.

Such teachers without special training are able to provide special education for the less seriously handicapped children and, with the assistance of a broadly trained special teacher, are able to meet the needs of most of the more seriously handicapped children. This means, however, that teacher-training institutions must give all prospective teachers some training in methods for meeting the needs of the exceptional child, and prospective special teachers a broader training which will enable them to serve not only as teachers of special classes but also as coaching teachers and as instructors of regular grade teachers.

Greater flexibility in the distribution of state aid would be of much assistance in the promotion of special education in the smaller school districts. Let the state pay the salary, or part of the salary, of one special teacher for X number of pupils in average daily attendance, and, subject to the approval of the state department of education, permit the local superintendent of schools to decide whether he will use this teacher to teach a special class, to coach exceptional children, or to train the regular staff of classroom teachers how to teach the exceptional child.

It is evident that the education of exceptional children is still in an experimental stage, and that its many problems offer a challenge to all who are interested in obtaining equality of educational opportunity for all children.—CHARLES SCOTT BERRY, *Director, Bureau of Special and Adult Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.*

sponsibilities. Among these, the United States Office of Education (now a part of the Federal Security Agency) is the original bureau established by the Congress of 1867 to "promote the cause of education throughout the country." It numbers among the spheres of its interests the education of exceptional children. It has the advantages that come from wide contacts in all the states and with all types of exceptional children; yet its service is restricted by the very breadth of its responsibilities. Viewing the situation in the nation as a whole, it attempts to keep abreast of developments, to evaluate trends, to provide opportunities through small working conferences for an interchange of experiences and discussion of problems, to give advisory service upon request, and in every way possible to foster the growth of programs within and by the states so that they will bring to all children deviating seriously in mental, physical, or emotional traits the educational opportunities which are their right during the elementary and secondary years.

In addition, there are governmental services which, while not directly concerned with the education of exceptional children, pertain to their later educational or vocational progress, or to essential factors of physical and social welfare. In the Office of Education is centered the federal program for the vocational rehabilitation of all types of physically handicapped adults and young people of employable age. Gallaudet College is a federally aided institution in Washington offering work of college grade to deaf students from all states. The U. S. Children's Bureau, in the Department of Labor, administers the provisions of the Social Security Act as they affect the physical and social care of crippled and delinquent children. The service for the blind, in the Library of Congress, operates a loan library of Braille books and of talking book records for the adult blind; while the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Ky., is subsidized by the federal government and publishes books and records used both by blind children and by adults.

And so we might continue, showing that, in one sense of the word, instead of *a* national program there are many programs operating under governmental or other auspices for particular handicapped groups. Yet, whether emanating from a voluntary agency or from a federal unit, no such program finds the realization of its objectives except through the states which it is designed to serve. To the states, then, one must look for the significant achievements and the significant principles of operation which give direction to the work of national agencies. Of these achievements and principles, too, educational administrators will wish to take cognizance in the further guidance of their own state and local programs for exceptional children.

Some Significant Achievements

Beginning with the first half of the nineteenth century, when residential schools for the blind, the deaf, and the mentally handicapped made their appearance in the United States, one can trace the progress of such institutions and the cumulative effect of both European and American influences through the ensuing hundred years. Today each state makes some provision for the education of its blind and its deaf children, either in a residential school of its own or in a school of a neighboring state. Each state, too, has some residential facilities for its socially maladjusted young people—juvenile delinquents who have been committed to its care by the courts; and all but three states make some provision for the institutional care of the feebleminded population, including in most cases an educational program for those who can profit thereby.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, one finds the beginning of a new emphasis. At that time special day schools and classes were established in a few city school systems to serve the seriously retarded, the visually handicapped, and the deaf children of the community. Interest grew as day school authorities recognized the need. Special classes appeared in an increasing number of cities and states, and for other types of exceptional children, until an extensive program of education for handicapped children in day schools paralleled the system of state residential schools already in operation throughout the country. Now the two types of programs complement each other, each serving a much needed purpose and each being governed within and by the particular state in which it is carried on.

Because the state is the governing body for the conduct of its total educational program, another development has taken place which is of great sig-

nificance for future progress in this field. Special educational adjustments needed by exceptional children in day schools can never reach all communities in any adequate measure until the state itself assumes the responsibility for promoting and guiding the program. Large urban centers may be well able to establish and to finance their own provisions, but small towns and rural communities for the most part must have both financial and supervisory assistance if an effective service is to be installed. Recognizing this need, sixteen states now include on the staffs of their education departments one or more persons definitely assigned to the supervision of the education of exceptional children on a statewide basis. All but three of these, and in addition six other states not providing supervisory service, furnish to local communities some degree of special financial aid to help meet the additional costs involved in securing special instructional facilities for handicapped children.

Still another achievement, which promises much for the proper coordination of the state program for exceptional children, is the growing recognition by state authorities of the place of the residential schools in the educational system. Originally established as charitable or welfare agencies, these state residential institutions for handicapped children operated quite apart from the education department. As a matter of fact, many of them still do so, but during the past 20 years there has been a marked trend in the direction of making them an integral part of the state school system, administered by the same educational agency which is officially responsible for the general conduct of all other public schools. One of the most recent legislative actions expressing this trend took place in Wisconsin in 1939, when the Bureau for Handicapped Children was created by law within the State Department of Public Instruction. The director of this bureau, who has the status of an assistant state superintendent, is responsible for the general direction of state services rendered through the special day classes for all types of handicapped children and through the residential schools for the blind and the deaf. With such an administrative arrangement, the state can be expected to coordinate and extend its program to a degree that would not be possible without unified supervision.

In summary, then, one may point to the following significant developments which constitute the very foundation stones of a statewide and a nationwide program of special education for exceptional children: (1) the establishment in practically every state of residential schools for the most serious deviates; (2) the consistent growth of day school facilities for handicapped pupils whose needs can be adequately met without institutionalization; (3) the acceptance by about one-third of the states of the responsibility for providing through their education departments special supervisory and financial assistance to promote the programs in local school systems; and (4) the tendency to integrate residential and day school programs under a unified state educational administration. The principles which have operated and the problems which have been encountered in bringing about these developments are the same everywhere and warrant serious consideration in any effort to bring about "a national program."

Some Fundamental Principles and Problems

At a conference of state directors and supervisors of special education, called by the United States Office of Education in June, 1940, the following statement was adopted:

> This conference reaffirms its faith in the basic objectives of American education. In our democracy the objective of equality of opportunity for all implies respect for the integrity and worthwhileness of individual human personality. It implies equity of opportunity of a kind which for all children aims to adjust educational organization, equipments, procedures, and curriculum to the needs of individuals.
>
> We reaffirm our faith that these principles apply with equal force to the understanding and education of those who by unfortunate circumstance of inheritance or accident present problems unique in nature and difficulty. To the handicapped child the accepted ideals and objectives in a democracy require, as for all children, opportunity for a satisfying measure of self-realization, and opportunity for such appropriate and adequate care and education as may contribute to an effective degree of social and vocational efficiency.

This statement enunciates the first principle upon which all education for exceptional children is based. It needs no further elaboration, for it assigns to so-called "special education" an unmistakable place in the general program of education in every community. In other words, provisions

for exceptional children are nothing more than the application of the fundamental educational principle relating to the treatment of individual differences to which all of us wholeheartedly subscribe. To devise the ways and means in which this principle can best be applied in the school program is the important problem growing out of it. Special schools, special classes in the regular schools, adjusted programs for individual pupils in regular classes, a vitalized curriculum in which each exceptional child will find those experiences which he needs—all these are legitimate means to the end sought. Each administrator must assume the responsibility of studying the situation in his own school system and of choosing on the basis of all available evidence the particular method of procedure which will bring the best results.

The second principle is likewise widely accepted, namely, that the state is the most efficient unit for public school support and general school administration; and, as a corollary, that the education department is the recognized state agency for the administration and supervision of the public schools. If this principle is applied, the state must recognize the additional costs involved in educating the visually defective, the crippled, the mentally deficient, and other handicapped groups, and it must allocate its funds accordingly. It must provide stimulating advisory service to assist the local communities, rural as well as urban, to make needed adjustments for exceptional children. It must coordinate its services for all such children, both in residential and in day schools, through a well-integrated administrative and supervisory plan. And it must see that an adequate number of well-qualified teachers are prepared to make special education for exceptional children a reality. All these things the state will logically do through its duly constituted educational agencies; and all of them present challenging problems of finance, of supervision, of teacher-training, and of administration. What is a fair plan of state aid for the various groups of handicapped children? What constitutes a sound teacher-training program? What curriculum changes should be made for the respective groups? What administrative and supervisory organization will be most helpful? Practices differ in these matters and various plans have been advocated as desirable. They are items which demand earnest study on the part of all who are interested in developing satisfactory state programs of education for exceptional children.

The third principle here suggested is that the federal government has an important responsibility toward the education of the handicapped children of the nation. Whether that responsibility shall be met in part through tangible aid to the states for the education of handicapped children to parallel the programs of assistance for vocational rehabilitation and of social security is a question that may yield some difference of opinion. It has recently had legislative consideration in the Congress of the United States, for with the united sponsorship of interested national and state agencies, a measure known as the Pepper-Boland Bill was introduced several years ago and received favorable committee action. Its passage would make available to the states a special fund for the education of physically handicapped children. In the present emergency, however, further action regarding it is awaiting developments. In any case, whether the federal government furnishes financial aid or not, it certainly should, by every means possible, stimulate the continued progress of the work for exceptional children which the states are expected to promote. It should be a center for advisory and informational service, and should be in a position to offer field assistance upon request. These functions the Office of Education is attempting to perform, in keeping with the charge given to it by the Congress of 1867—unfortunately with serious limitations of staff and with many consequent gaps in its program. Again specific problems arise out of the enunciation of a general principle, and educators in the states can contribute to their solution. What service projects should the Office of Education undertake? What means can be used to assure their realization? Should the federal government contribute financially to the education of exceptional children? What can educators do to further desirable federal services in this respect?

Enrollments in residential schools, in special day schools, and in classes for exceptional children, as reported to the United States Office of Education, approximate 350,000. A very conservative estimate of the number who should receive special attention because of serious mental, physical, or

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A State Educational Program

By FRANK V. POWELL

PROGRESS in education is best made when the development is guided by a plan. A plan is not a fixed set of details but a statement of some established principles which may be used in determining the specifics of the program. In this sense a program is not something which has been done, is being done, or will be done. It has parts of all three. It will project into the future and indicate the things to be done and which might now be done if time and funds and personnel permitted. Education for the handicapped has been accepted as a public responsibility in the United States and so the formulation of a state plan is timely.

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Statement of Principles

A program for the education of the handicapped is based upon a faith in the correctness of the objectives of American public education. One of the significant objectives is that our schools have been created not to make all equal but to assist every one to achieve as much as his capacity, effort, and character will permit. This implies a belief in the educational concept that one child has a right to the same opportunity to develop his capacity as does any other child. This implies a belief in the education of all and in an effort to prevent the increase of ineffective individuals. We have long given lip service to these implications but have failed to put them into practice. We still deify a school pace based upon the assumption, if it can be said to have any basis, that all children mature at the same rate, that all learn at the same rate, and that all want to learn the same things. We still run schools much as though all were academically minded and all were aiming for a college diploma.

If we know anything educationally it is that children are different and that they mature differently—mentally, socially, and physically. Some children are socially minded, some are mechanically inclined, some have an academic bent, and some have rather unique capacities. By ignoring the individual traits of children the schools not only fail to remedy certain handicaps but may be actually developing them.

Respect for the individual and for equality of opportunity to achieve, according to capacity and desire, calls for an educational program so adjusted in organization, equipment, procedures, curricula, books, laboratories, shops, pupil activities, and other school elements that each child may have his or her opportunity to grow physically, to mature emotionally, and to develop mentally in such manner as to find a niche in the social, political, and economic life of adults when grown. These statements imply that respect for personality and equality of opportunity apply with equal force to the education of those who, by unfortunate circumstances of birth or misfortune since birth, deviate from the so-called normal in certain definite respects. The deviations may be due to physical modifications, such as defects of the organs of speech, hearing, sight, and heart, or a crippled condition. Or, the deviations may be due to social, psychological, or neurological deficiencies which produce mental retardation, social unbalance, or emotional disturbances. It is rather important to keep in mind the fact that all handicaps are not of the visible and, hence, rather noticeable physical type. Until quite recently most thought was given to the physically handicapped child. A state program should include all types of deviates, and neither uniqueness nor the difficultness of the handicap should be cause for denying any child a measure of opportunity for appropriate self-realization.

If these statements be accepted as basic principles for a program, then it will necessarily follow that the program of education for handicapped children must be considered as an integral part

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emotional deviation has been placed at more than ten times this number. No doubt many children not assigned to special groups are receiving from capable teachers of regular classes a type of help which goes far in effecting desirable adjustments But the fact remains that a far larger number are going without the special attention they need because there is no plan under way to insure it. When the three principles emphasized in this article are translated into action and when the major problems they evoke have been met, we shall have for exceptional children of all types, in every part of the country, well-planned programs of adjustment in local school systems and in residential schools, fostered by a state which renders financial assistance and exercises intelligent and kindly supervision through its recognized educational agency. Then we shall really have "a national program" for the education of exceptional children, because local, state, and national forces will each contribute in an acceptable way and with coordinated action to the total plan.

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